

CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST



FEBRUARY 1991 #164

BARKERS CREEK NOTES

Following a period with few birds on the block - due most likely to late winter rains - with the arrival of a few hot days recently, they have returned. Amongst them the pallid cuckoo has been very vocal - in other years it has hardly been heard - also the sacred kingfisher. A grey thrush heralded the dawn each morning, and the kookaburras have their nest in a hole in the bank again.

Our resident magpies worked hard to raise a family, occasionally tipping one on its back, to discipline it, where it would lie, mute with its feet in the air, for some time.

The usual honeyeaters and thornbills are around. Common and brush bronzewings are finding a meal under the cherry ballart. The rufous whistler, spinebill, grey fantail, pardalote and others come for a drink. One day in particular, mistletoe birds seemed to be numerous, while two male red-capped robins had a shadow-boxing duel on a branch of a small wattle, which was quite prolonged before one decided enough is enough, and left.

Yesterday an eastern shrike-tit was here. An occasional eastern rosella, along with many crimsons, and clusters of lorikeets added to the collection. In the distance an oriole called.

We also had a 4 foot brown snake, in the glasshouse, which disappeared down a hole before we could evict it.

Wyn Palmer 19-11-1990.

Wyn Palmer reported in mid-January that an Owlet-nightjar has taken over the nesting box which overlooks their dining area. It often sits at the entrance sunning itself. I had the privilege of seeing some of Russell's latest bird slides, which included a Spotted Crake, taken from his chair on the edge of a lagoon at Mildura. He said that he finds if he just sits quietly for a while the birds will return and just go on feeding, and that there's no reason why the bird on the creek off Gaulton Street wouldn't do the same. He had Spot-less Crakes feeding around the chair legs while he sat there on one occasion.

AUSTRALIA DAY BIRD COUNT

For some years we have made a bird count on Australia day. All of the birds seen on, or over, our house block are recorded. The count starts at 7.00 a.m. and ends at 8.00 a.m. It is sometimes hard to know whether many birds are seen, or a few making repeated visits. The weather was fine and sunny.

The birds seen were

Blackbirds. Numerous sightings. Some nest in the corner tree. At least a pair was usually present at any time. 8 were visible on one occasion.

Sparrows. About 10 visits were made; some of these would be the same birds.

Starlings. Several visits.

Greenfinch. Single seen. One nests nearby.

Silver eye. Two visits of a pair

White cockatoo. One bird flew overhead.

This is the poorest result during the time that the count has been made. Only two natives!

Other birds seen but which were not observed on the block, included magpies (several were seen two houses away), domestic pigeons (flock of six, flying nearby), Indian turtle-dove (a pair about a metre from the fence), a red wattlebird. A lorikeet was heard.

E.P.

THE 1990 BIRDLISTS

During 1990, 55 bird lists were compiled and collated. The bird lists were for Club excursions, or outings by one or more members to local areas. The lists indicate whether or not a bird was sighted, and do not give an indication of the number of each bird seen.

The eleven most frequently recorded birds were

Magpie	93%	Raven, Australian	47%
Wren, Superb Blue	69%	Galah	47%
Wattlebird, Red	56%	Fantail, Grey	45%
Rosella, Eastern	51%	Rosella, Crimson	45%
Kookaburra	49%	Firetail, Red-browed	43%
Swallow, Welcome	49%		

Birds sighted on less than 4% of outings have not been included in the report below,

GREBES may be under-recorded, as it is often difficult to distinguish between the Australian and hoary-headed grebes. However, Australian grebes (29% of lists) were much more often seen than hoary-headed grebe (9%)

LARGE WATER BIRDS. Surprisingly, darters (7%) were twice as commonly seen as pelicans. Little pied cormorants were by far the most common of the cormorants (31%). Little black cormorants were next with 9%. White-faced herons were fairly common (27%), with white-necked only 5%. Sacred ibis were a little more than twice as common (13%) as straw-neck ibis. Yellow spoonbills were on 7% of the lists and swans were on 22% of the lists.

DUCKS and TEAL. The black duck was most common (33%). Others were shelduck (19%), maned duck and musk duck (each 18%), grey teal (14%), and hardhead (4%).

OTHER WATERBIRDS. Masked lapwings were on 31% of lists, coot on 21%. Silver gulls were seen on 7% of the outings, and swamphen on only 3%.

HAWKS. As in 1989, relatively few birds of prey were recorded, in part due, possibly, to the difficulty of distinguishing between some species. Brown falcons were most common (13%), with little eagles and black-shouldered kites each gaining 9%. A total of 13 species of hawk were recorded.

PIGEONS. The only pigeons seen were common bronzewings (14%) and crested pigeons (4%).

COCKATOOS AND PARROTS Eastern rosellas were the most common parrot (51%) with crimson rosellas only slightly less so (45%). Galahs were the seen on almost half of the excursions (47%). Surprisingly, cockatoos were much less often seen, being recorded on only 14% of the lists. Long-billed corellas were seen on 9% of outings. Others were red-rump parrot (16%), swift parrots (7%). Little and musk lorikeets each rated 13%.

CUCKOOS. Although common this spring, not many records were made. Four cuckoos (fan-tailed, pallid, shining bronze and horsefield) were recorded on 4% of lists.

BLACK-FACED CUCKOO SHRIKE was seen on 24% of outings. Little shrikes were less common, being on 5% of the lists.

ROBINS. A feature this year were red-capped robin (4%). Flame robins were scarce (only 5%). Scarlet Robins (36%) were the most common, followed by the yellow robin (31%), jacky winters (14%) and hooded robins (8%). Eastern shrike-tits were on 18% of lists.

WHISTLER. Rufous whistlers (25%) and golden whistlers (18%) were seen fairly often.

SHRIKE THRUSH. Recorded on 33% of the lists.

CRESTED BELL-BIRD was surprisingly often recorded, with a score of 13%

FANTAILS. Grey fantails were most common (47%), followed by willy wagtails (36%) and restless flycatchers (25%)

WHITE-BROWED BABBLERS were seen on 15% of excursions.

THORNBILLS. Weebills, brown, buff-tailed, yellow tailed and striated thornbills were almost equally common, being on 20 to 25% of the lists. Yellow thornbills had about half this number of recordings.

TREECREEPERS. White-throated treecreepers (29%) were most common, followed by brown treecreepers (20%) and sittellas (13%)

HONEYEATERS. Wattlebirds were most common (60%). Others were yellow-faced (42%), yellow-tufted (36%), white-naped (35%), white-plumed (35%), fuscous (29%), white-eared (20%), noisy miners (16%), brown-headed (13%), New Holland honeyeaters (7%) and eastern spinebills (7%)

MISTLETOE BIRDS were seen on 9% of outings, and white-fronted chat on 4%

PARDALOTES Spotted (35%) were slightly more common than striated (29%).

SILVER EYES 31%

RED-BROWED FIRETAILS were very common in 1990 and were recorded on 45% of excursions. Diamond firetails were however scarce (2%).

ORIOLES were often heard in the last part of the year, and were on 11% of lists,

WOODSWALLOWS. Only the dusky was recorded (16%)

CURRAWONGS ETC. As usual, the magpie was most common (93% of lists). Others were Australian ravens (49%), choughs (42%), mudlarks (42%), grey currawongs (32%), little ravens (16%), and pied currawongs (4%).

INTRODUCED BIRDS Sparrows (20%), starlings (20%), black-birds (18%), goldfinches (13%) and Indian mynahs (4%). The count would have been greater if all lists had started from the township.

GRASSES OF THE CASTLEMAINE BOTANIC GARDENS

The west side of the Castlemaine Botanic gardens has a wide variety of native grasses. Of particular note is the number of species of spear-grass and wallaby grass. The species identified so far are

Agrostis aemula (Blown grass)
Chionochloa pallida (Red-anther wallaby-grass)
Danthonia caespitosa (Tufted wallaby-grass)
Danthonia eriantha (Hill wallaby-grass)
Danthonia geniculata (Kneed wallaby-grass)
Danthonia linkii (Link's wallaby-grass)
Danthonia penicillata (Slender wallaby-grass)
Danthonia pilosa (Velvet wallaby-grass)
Danthonia racemosa (Wallaby-grass)
Danthonia setacea (Bristly wallaby-grass)
Dichelachne crinita (Long-hair plume-grass)
Elymus scabrus (Common wheat-grass)
Phragmites australis (Common reed)
Poa labillardieri (Tussock grass)
Poa sieberi (Tussock grass)
Stipa blackii (Crested spear-grass)
Stipa densiflora (Foxtail spear-grass)
Stipa mollis (Soft spear-grass)
Stipa nodosa (Jointed spear-grass)
Stipa oligostachya (Spear-grass)
Stipa rudis (Rough spear-grass)
Stipa scabra (Spear-grass)
Stipa stiposa (Tasmanian spear-grass)
Themeda triandra (Spear-grass)

CAN YOU HELP?

BIRD LISTS.

The bird lists made by members, and the lists made on Club excursions are added to the master list, to give a picture of the sightings for the year. If you go on an outing and make a bird list for the outing, then please give a copy of the list to E. Perkins. Only more or less local lists please - not for interstate trips, or Gippsland. About 25-30 km radius would be local. It does not matter how many or how few birds are on the list - trips when only a few birds were seen are important.

PLANT LISTS.

Plant lists for the central highlands area are being made. The area covered by the lists are kept is the rectangle with corners near St Arnaud, Rochester, Lancefield and Mt Cole. In this area, records for the 10 minute grids are kept - that is for blocks about 15 km square. Any list for a definite area, no matter how small the list, (it could be only one plant) would be useful. Copies to E. Perkins please.

EXCURSIONS AND GUEST SPEAKERS.

We have some excellent speakers at our meetings. This is a result of a co-operative effort. Can you help by suggesting to one of the committee the kind of program you would like? And if you can suggest a person to provide a program it would be greatly appreciated. Suggestions for excursion localities would also be welcomed. Do you have a favourite spot that you could show others?

AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM MAGAZINE

The Club subscribes to this excellent magazine, and is placed directly in the town library, where it can be borrowed by Club members (and by interested members of the public).

BIRD LIST - LAURISTON

The list of birds seen on the Club's December excursion to Glenluce and Lauriston totalled 53 species.

Grebe, Hoary Headed	Pipit
Cormorant, Little Pied	Blackbird
Heron, White-faced	Robin, Yellow
Heron, Pacific	Whistler, Rufous
Ibis, Sacred	Fantail, Grey
Spoonbill, Yellow	Wagtail, Willy
Swan	Wren, Superb Blue
Shelduck, Australian	Thornbill, Brown
Duck, Pacific Black	Thornbill, Buff-tailed
Teal, Grey	Thornbill, Yellow-tailed
Duck, Maned	White-face
Duck, Musk	Treecreeper White-thr
Kite, Black-shouldered	Honeyeater, Yellow-faced
Kestrel, Aust (Nankeen)	Honeyeater, Yellow-tuft
Coot	Honeyeater, Fuscous
Lapwing, Masked	Honeyeater, White plumed
Galah	Honeyeater, White-naped
Lorikeet, Musk	Pardalote, Striated
Lorikeet, Little	Goldfinch
Rosella, Crimson	Sparrow
Rosella, Eastern	Firetail, Red-browed
Parrot, Red-rumped	Starling
Kookaburra	Chough, White-winged
Kingfisher, Sacred	Mudlark
Swallow, Welcome	Woodswallow, Dusky
Martin, Tree	Magpie
	Raven, Little

Thankyou to all who contributed to the magazine over the past 12 months. Every contribution helps towards an interesting magazine and makes the work so much easier. A special thankyou to Ern Perkins who has done so much to help. Ed.

The 1991 list has already commenced. Contributions from Club members is invited.

NOTES FOR DEC/JAN

ORCHIDS AT HEPBURN in Early December. Hyacinth orchids were developing, and a bird orchid was still in flower (FD). Several hyacinth orchids were also seen at Sandon (SS), Fryerstown and Guildford (CN).

NESTS AT SANDON. Rufous Whistler and Goldfinch nesting at Sandon makes a new breeding record for the Club's list. (SS)

MUSK LORIKEETS have been numerous in the district (MO, CN & KT at the December meeting). Over January, flocks of Musk lorikeets have been feeding on the apricot trees and plums. Only musk lorikeets were observed. (EP)

PAINTED HONEYEATER AT FRYERSTOWN. C Norwood reported a bird identified as a painted honeyeater, at Fryerstown. It was taking grass, so may have been nesting.

EUCALYPTUS CADENS specimen from the Warby Ranges was on display. It is closely related to Swamp Gums, but has glaucous juvenile leaves.

ADDITIONS TO THE BIRD LIST. New area records are Cape Barren goose (p), buff-rump thornbill (f), fairy martin (f), Musk lorikeet (f), Little lorikeet (f), purple-crowned lorikeet (f), white-browed scrub-wren (m).

KOALA was observed in Kalimna forest in late December. On this occasion, the koala was discovered while walking a dog, and the koala may not have been seen had the dog not responded. Koalas are seen from time to time in the local forests, and may be much more common than sightings suggest.

CAPE BARREN GOOSE was observed swimming on the large dam between Irishtown and Vaughan. This is the third sighting of a Cape Barren goose over the past few years. DOLLARBIRD was reported at Glengower (between Clunes and Campbelltown) over a period of a week. It was observed flying around in the evening. (Ballarat Courier 12/1/91)

ELTHAM COPPER-BUTTERFLY. Several visits were made to Kalimna during late December and early January, to look for the butterfly. Although butterflies were numerous, none of the Eltham variety were seen.

INTERMEDIATE EGRET AT HARCOURT NORTH was reported in the Jan/Feb 1991 issue of Whirrakee. This is uncommon in this part of Victoria. Sighting was on 15/10/90.

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. PROGRAM

Fri 8 Feb. MEMBERS AND VISITORS NIGHT. Members are asked to provide a small section of the program. This is the annual meeting. 8 p.m. at the High School.

Sat 9 Feb. MCKAY RESERVOIR. A visit to the McKay reservoir at Chewton. Meet SEC, Mostyn St at 1.30 pm sharp.

Mar 8-11. HOWMAN'S GAP. Labour Day weekend VFNCA and WVFNCA campout at Howman's Gap. organised by North East F.N.C. See separate notice.

Fri 8 Mar. To be arranged. 8 p.m. at the High School

Sat 9 Mar. Excursion to be arranged.

Sun 6 Oct. MUCKLEFORD FOREST with Ballarat F.N.C.

Meetings on the second Friday of each month (Jan excepted) at Castlemaine High School at 8.00 p.m. Business meetings on the fourth Thursday at 38 Campbell St at 7.30 p.m.

All members are invited to attend.

Visitors are invited to attend the Club's sessions.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc
P.O. Box 324, Castlemaine 3450

Committee: Ern Perkins (Pres), Chris Norwood (V. Pres), Maggie Oliver (V. Pres), Barbara Maund (Sec), Clodagh Norwood (Treas), Kaye Turner, George Broadway, Rita Mills (Newsletter), Ian Higgins, Robyn Holden.

Subscriptions. The committee recommends the following

Student/Pensioner	\$7 (was \$5)	Single	\$10 (was \$8)
Supporting	\$20 (was \$15)	Family	\$15 (was \$12)
Newsletter posted: Subscription plus \$6 (was \$5).			

HOWMAN'S GAP CAMPOUT.

Date: Fri Mar 8 - Mon 11 March (long weekend)

Host: North East (Wangaratta) F.N.C.

Location: Howmans Gap Alpine Camp

Accommodation: Modern chalet type building. Interior toilets and showers. 2-8 bunk room type sleeping.

Blankets & pillows provided, bring own linen.

Cost: \$70.00/head approx. Includes meals (except Frid)

Groups: botany, bird watching, photography, general, or full day walks. Detailed program in February.

Contact: Mrs Laurice Kneen RMB 7539 Wangaratta 3678

Register by Feb 8th. Registration forms from E. Perkins